

# JETSETTER



## ISLAND LIFE

BLISSED-OUT STAYS  
ON EIGHT ASIAN ISLES

PRIVATE JET  
ESCAPES:  
BESPOKE STAYS  
IN AFRICA

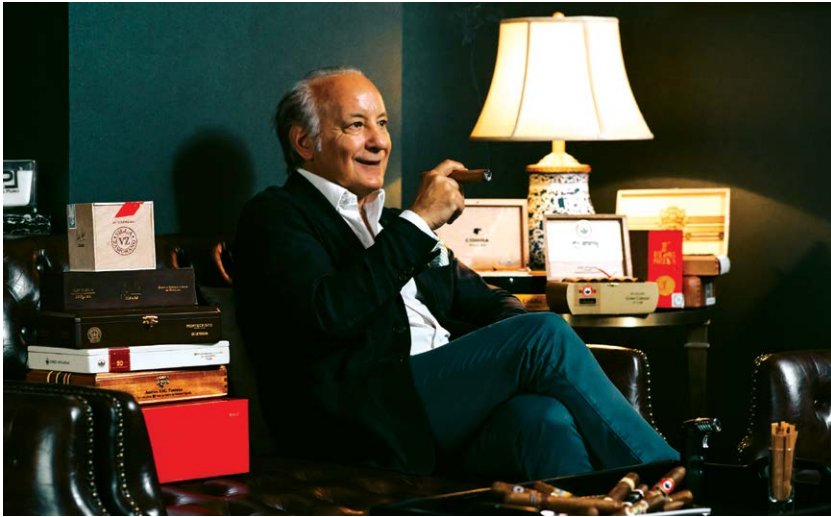
25 THINGS  
TO DO IN  
HONG KONG

PEOPLE • PLACES • PROPERTY • PLAY



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# SMOKIN' HOT

From its sumptuous confines reminiscent of an old English club, Bertie Cigars is introducing customers to New World terroirs and collectible smokes, as owner **Eric Piras** tells **Helen Dalley**

**You opened Bertie Cigars in Central last year. Did you have any knowledge of cigars prior to this?**

Yes – I founded my cigar business, Cigraal, in 2015. At the beginning we were mainly importing and exporting into Hong Kong then we expanded into Hong Kong wholesale and travel retail. Off the back of that, I set up the Cigraal Academy, which offers bespoke training and tasting session for retailers and food & beverage specialists as well as cigar aficionados and aficionados. Then I opened Bertie last March.

**How have you adapted to the pandemic at Bertie?**

We've followed all of the various Hong Kong government guidelines and carried on with our business. We were the first cigar lounge in Hong Kong to invest in a disinfection system to make sure we had a safe place for guests and staff. Due to travelling restrictions, many

of our customers have been staying in Hong Kong for longer periods of time and have been visiting Bertie more often than usual. Some customers bring their laptops and do some work here.

**What are the most popular cigars with your customers?**

Traditionally, Hong Kong customers are Cuban aficionados. At Bertie, we offer a lot of other terroirs and staff are well trained to make recommendations. We have seen an increase in sales of New World (non-Cuban) cigars. At the moment, we're selling 60 per cent New World and 40 per cent Cuban. We are proud to lead that change in consumer behaviour.

The Bertie cigar selection of five vitolas (sizes) are very popular. Those cigars are handmade exclusively for me. The blend is put together in Danli, Honduras, and I never disclose the origin of the tobacco composing those cigars. We don't even say what the blend of those cigars is!

**What are some popular cigar and beverage pairings?**

Our clients enjoy different drinks with their cigars, from a simple Coke or Pu'er tea to whisky, rum, wine, or even Champagne, sake and tequila. Personally, I like to drink malt whisky and rum. I also enjoy old Cognacs from Lheraud, and a good Bas Armagnac.

**What advice do you have for customers who are new to cigars?**

I always suggest to start the journey with light to medium strength cigars from Honduras, the Dominican Republic or Nicaragua. All of those cigars deliver good aromas and flavour

without being too strong. You'll find a good selection of Flor de Selva, Arturo Fuente and Joya de Nicaragua cigars at Bertie, all of which are excellent for beginners. New cigar smokers should avoid long, big cigars and those that are too strong or full bodied. The best size for new cigar aficionados are petit corona, corona and short robusto.

**Do many of your customers collect cigars and is this a growing market?**

Yes indeed, we have quite a nice number of customers collecting cigars. They love vintage cigars, limited editions, special editions and regional editions. This April, I did a global launch of the Cuatro Cinco Asian Edition, 1,000 boxes of 10 cigars. We did a digital launch on social media and a series of videos and Zoom events. It was the first time that a cigar has been launched worldwide this way, and it's already a collector's item!

**When do you hope to host tasting events again?**

We had a few events lined up that have had to be postponed, like a Glenfarclas tasting, the La Notte Italiana night with an Italian tenor, and a Quintessential Whites night, with Champagne and white Burgundy wines. Then there's our live Latino music by Chris Polanco and his band Azucar Latina, and the events with my Cigraal Academy, like our blind tastings. Hopefully we can begin to restart all this in October.

Next year, we hope to receive visits from famous cigar makers including Carlito Fuente, A. Fuente, Maya Selva, Flor de Selva, Juan Martinez and Joya de Nicaragua. [bertiecigars.com](http://bertiecigars.com)